



# Tourism employees' interpretation of the Business Social Responsibility concept in the Western Cape Province, South Africa

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## Abstract

In developing countries, tourism businesses develop and implement business social responsibility (BSR) programmes. However, their implementation is usually unsuccessful because BSR's success depends on employees' understanding and knowledge. A total of 307 tourism businesses were selected through a stratified sampling method. Purposive sampling assisted to identify employees, of which 452 were surveyed. Government tourism departments were identified as the key informants. Data was captured through the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) and analysed using a stakeholder framework. The majority of respondents agreed that BSR is all about moral issues and managers are ultimately responsible for its implementation. Tourism businesses' length of operation, size and the government's involvement were all found to affect BSR interpretation and implementation. Governments should support and encourage long-term business operation and expansion towards enhanced sustainability.

**Keywords:** Business social responsibility, employees, stakeholders, tourism, sustainability

## Introduction

Business Social Responsibility (BSR) refers to a business's obligations to increase its positive impacts while minimising its negative impacts on those affected by its business activities (Darrtey-Baah & Amaponsah-Tawiah, 2011). The BSR imperative requires that businesses in general, and tourism businesses in particular, validate their existence and operations especially in developing countries such as South Africa (Van der Merwe & Wocke, 2007). Yirenkyi-Boateng (2011) is of the view that these businesses must authenticate their presence in terms of not only job creation but also community upliftment. They should justify their operations by making substantial contributions to the welfare of the broader social environments in which they operate (Yirenkyi-Boateng, 2011). BSR provides the context for such broad-based tourism performance evaluation. This philosophy encourages tourism companies to integrate public welfare issues into their business operations (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2013). Newell and Frynas (2007) note that tourism BSR can be designed in various ways. Consequently, there are numerous approaches to tourism BSR. The most popular approach is philanthropy. Incorporation of tourism BSR activities to business strategies is also another approach common among tourism businesses. Other tourism businesses involve in BSR programmes for benchmarking in the competitive environment. Newell and Frynas (2007) argue that tourism BSR is anything one needs it to be, while Evangelinos, Zotou, Kavakli and Balis (2008) highlight that many socio-economic theories relate tourism BSR adoption processes to variables such as the size, age and profit



volumes of businesses. Due to many interpretations and approaches that exist on the BSR concept, there is much confusion among tourism employees about the concept of BSR and how it should be incorporated into day-to-day business activities. According to Lund-Thomsen (2005), tourism BSRs have been a subject of many discussions and debates over the years, which take various forms and are supported by different interests. The current study seeks to assess an understanding of BSRs in the South African tourism industry, with a particular focus of Western Cape Province. Crane and Matten (2007) indicate that globally BSRs date as far back as the 1950s in the form of philanthropic activities. During this period, companies typically supported good initiatives with donations, and the BSR concept developed around social and environmental issues, ethics and stakeholder interests. Diorisio and McCain (2007) argue that philanthropy was initially entirely charitable. Today most tourism companies are integrating BSR in their business core strategies to empower the poor and marginalised sections of society (Lund-Thomsen, 2005).

Although this is the case, a key issue in the current study is on how well this BSR phenomenon is known and understood by the tourism industry employees in South Africa. Ugur and Yarimoglu (2015) argue that while BSR concept has featured in many research studies, the interpretation of BSR remains an underexplored area. Seeletse and Ladzani (2012); Taru and Gukurume (2013) state that although BSR has a long and protracted history, it is a new phenomenon in the tourism industry and South Africa as a whole. Kasim (2004); Golja and Nižic (2010) argue that the management and workers of various businesses including tourism businesses seem unable to define and understand fully the exact indicators or variables for measuring BSR mandates. Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Baah (2006) similarly contend that BSR's nature varies in businesses and it is determined by the type of business or products offered, size of business and length of business operation. There is also a confusion in tourism industry regarding the application of sustainable development, responsible tourism and BSR concepts. Sustainable tourism refers to protecting and preserving resources for future generations, but focuses excessively on the environment. Hence, responsible tourism emerged, which shifted the focus to the triple bottom line comprising the environment, society and the economy. Because the industry found the two concepts confusing, it moved towards BSR. Unlike responsible tourism, BSR is a concept that emphasis on tourism businesses' commitment not only to the triple bottom line but also to empowering economically marginalised groups and communities through employment, equity and entrepreneurship (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2002). However, according to Dzansi (2016), BSR brings more positive economic impacts if directed at employees than any other stakeholders such as for example, community. Sharp (2006) is of the view that many questions remain unanswered in relation to BSR and its contribution to development and assisting in fulfilling the United Nations Global Compact development goals set in 2000. In the current study, the researchers hoped to provide solid answers in relation to how the Western Cape Province's tourism employees in South Africa understood and interpret the concept of BSR and the underlying factors for their interpretations.

### **Theoretical framework**

Stakeholder theory plays a major role in the interpretation and implementation of BSR activities. As mentioned by Dzansi (2016), more positive outcomes of BSR initiatives are felt if these initiatives are directed to employees more than other stakeholders. Jain (2013) and Valeriya (2012) argue that the tourism businesses that support the classical approach, for example, support activities that ensure maximisation of profit, employment and tax payment. Conversely, the stakeholder view focuses on the effects of a tourism business on society. Valeriya (2012) and Jain (2013) contend that what constitutes the social responsibility depends on the beliefs and perceptions of tourism businesses and their stakeholders including employees. Therefore, what creates social responsibility depends entirely on the perspective of a tourism business and its stakeholders (Lindgreen, Kotler, Vanhamme & Maon, 2012).



According to Shahzad and Sillanpaa (2013), stakeholder theory states that tourism businesses should be responsible for their stakeholders such as employees in addition to their shareholders. Although shareholders are stakeholders, shareholders own parts of the tourism businesses through stock ownership (Shahzad & Sillanpaa, 2013). Yirenkyi-Boateng (2011) mentions that other stakeholders, such as employees, customers and government, do not own stock in the tourism businesses but have an interest in the businesses' performance. The understanding and interpretation of BSR therefore relies heavily on the level of impact in which BSR has on its stakeholders such as employees (Lindgreen *et al.*, 2012). Some actors believe that tourism businesses should aim to maximise profit and continue to gain a competitive advantage. Others disagree and feel that tourism businesses should be held accountable for their actions (Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004). Therefore, in this study, an examination of the concrete interpretations of BSR by the tourism employees in Western Cape of South Africa is made.

## Study methods

Qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. Qualitative element ascertained the interpretation of BSR by tourism employees in the Western Cape Province. On one hand quantitative component was used to measure inputs and outputs of data. According to Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2011), the application of qualitative and quantitative research methods reduce the limitation of choosing one approach over the other. Two Western Cape district municipalities comprised the population of the current study for two reasons; those that were popular among overseas travellers and have the highest number of tourist attractions were considered. The City of Cape Town Municipality (Metropolitan) and the Cape Winelands District Municipality were then identified. The tourism businesses were selected from the Western Cape Investment and Trade Promotion Agency (Wesgro), the City of Cape Town Tourism Department, Cape Town Tourism and the Cape Winelands District Municipality' data bases. A total population of 826 was drawn with an exclusion of bed and breakfasts, guest houses and backpackers accommodation establishments due to their low BSR commitment. The City of Cape Town consisted of four hundred and twenty four tourism businesses, while Cape Winelands District Municipality made up of four hundred and two. A total of three hundred and seven tourism businesses, were surveyed, in which 452 questionnaires were completed successfully.

Sampling procedures were followed in which cluster, stratified and purposive sampling methods were utilised. Cluster sampling helped to group businesses according to their geographical setting, while stratified sampling method used to divide businesses into different categories such as tour operators and travel agencies. The researchers applied purposive sampling to emphasise on the quality instead of quantity. According to Blanche *et al.* (2011), purposive sampling is where the researcher pick out cases for theoretical reasons, hence managers and general employees responsible for BSRs were identified for the current study. Managers design and endorse BSR policies, while employees implement BSR activities.

Multiple indicators of a variable was applicable to test reliability of the questionnaire. The questions were applied to measure each variable and a test-retest method adopted from Babbie (1992) and Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) was used. The same measurement was applied to test any variations. Questions were formulated in diverse ways and were repetitive. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha was used. The overall Cronbach's alpha value for reliability. was interpreted in the study as good reliability at above 0.8, acceptable reliability at 0.6 to 0.8, and unacceptable reliability at below 0.6. The overall Cronbach alpha test had an output between 0.7 and 0.8, which was considered good for this study. SPSS version 22 was used to analyse the results of the study. Through the application of this computer software, the researchers produced frequencies on the total number of tourism businesses.

## Results

Table 1 provides the responses of the employees to 'yes' or 'no' statements. The first statement posits that tourism BSR is a management responsibility. The majority of respondents (91.5%) agreed and 8.5% disagreed. The second statement mentioned that BSR helps increase business profits and 64.5% ticked 'yes'. The majority (94.9%) were of the view that BSR is about moral issues, while only 5.1% thought otherwise. About half (52.2%) believed that BSR measures are unclear and 47.8% believed otherwise. A small number (17.4%) agreed that BSR misuses tourism businesses resources, and 59.3% disagreed that managers and business owners use BSR to advance their personal agendas. The last statement tested whether the respondents felt that BSR frameworks and regulations vary from one country, city, town and company to another. The majority (91.2%) agreed and 8.8% disagreed.

Table 1: Tourism businesses employees' interpretation of BSR

Tourism business interpretation of BSR (N = 452, in %)		
Statements	Yes	No
BSR is management's responsibility	91.5	8.5
BSR helps increase businesses profits	64.5	35.5
BSR is about moral issues	94.9	5.1
BSR measurements are not clear	52.2	47.8
BSR misuses businesses resources	17.4	82.6
Managers and business owners use BSR to advance their personal agendas	40.7	59.3
BSR frameworks and regulations vary from one country, city, town and company to another	91.2	8.8

## Determinants of tourism employees BSR interpretation

In order to find out what informs the respondents' interpretation of BSR in the Western Cape tourism industry, the respondents were further asked to provide information regarding the size of their businesses, see Table 2, and the length of their businesses operation (Table 3). The level of government's involvement on BSR implementation was also tested to find out if it affects the tourism employees' understanding of BSR concept. The results are depicted in Table 4.

### Size of tourism business

The respondents were requested to indicate the total number of employees in their respective tourism businesses. The total number of employees was used to determine the size of the surveyed tourism businesses, as seen in Table 2. The highest percentage of respondents (33.3%) represents tourism businesses that consist of one to ten employees. Of the remaining businesses, 19.2% maintained confidentiality about their employee numbers, 14.6% mentioned 11 to 20 employees and 7.9% cited 21 to 30 employees. Those with more than 200 employees constituted less than 2.6%, while 2% of tourism businesses had over 300 workers.

Total number of employees (N = 452, in %)			
No. of employees	%	No. of employees	%
1 – 10	33.3	41 – 50	2.6
Unknown	19.2	200 – 300	2.6
11 - 20	14.6	300 >	2.0
21 - 30	7.9	91 –100	1.4
30 – 40	6.6	71 – 80	1.3
100 – 200	5.5	61 – 70	0.3

51 – 60	2.7		
<b>Total = 100</b>			

Table 2: Total number of employees in the surveyed tourism businesses

### Length of operation

The respondents were asked to indicate their businesses' periods of operation. Table 3 presents the tourism businesses period of operation. Of these businesses, 21.5% had been operating for 6 to 10 years, 21.1% for 16 to 20 years, 16.5% for 11 to 15 years, and 14.7% for 1 to 5 years. Respondents could not provide an answer in 8.9% of cases.

Table 3: Tourism businesses' periods of operation

Tourism business period of operation (N = 452, in %)			
6 – 10 years	21.5	21 – 30 years	4.5
16 – 20 years	21.1	60>	3.0
11 – 15 years	16.5	31 – 40 years	2.9
1 – 5 years	14.7	51 – 60 years	1.4
Do not know	8.9	41 – 50 years	0.6
Less than a year	4.5	Confidential	0.4
<b>Total = 100</b>			

### Level of government's involvement on BSR implementation

Tourism departments and agencies were also surveyed as key informants of the study to assess if government's involvement in BSR implementation affects tourism employees' interpretation of the BSR concept. Table 4 indicates that the various government tourism departments agree, 60% in involving and dissemination of BSR information to various tourism businesses in the province. This is mainly done through the use of toolkits, indicated by 60% of respondents. Research funding is the main incentive identified by 60% of respondents. In addition, 50% of respondents hold multi-stakeholder dialogues quarterly or annually; 80% of respondents discussed environmental issues at these meetings. However, the reporting procedures, training and skills including access to BSR information by tourism businesses was indicated by few respondents as indicated in Table 4. Further, the results in Table 4 show that tourism businesses that receive the most support are accommodation establishments (75%), followed by car rental (40%), while also accommodation, 80% and attractions, 66.7% were the most tourism business practicing BSR see Table 4.

Government's involvement in Western Cape tourism BSR (N = 5) (Multiple responses permitted)			
1. Western Cape tourism government departments and agencies			
Province: Economic Development & Tourism	20	Cape Winelands District Municipality	20
COCT: Tourism Development	40	Cape Town Tourism	20
2. Do tourism departments in the Western Cape promote BSR			
Yes	60	No	40
3. Ways to support BSR ideas			
Implementing business support initiatives	20	Selection of one NGO once a year and supporting it	20
Supporting tourism events (R30 000)	20	Hosting awareness workshop	20
		Initiated Responsible Tourism	20
4. Total number of tourism businesses supported			
Accommodation	75	Tour operators	20
Car rental agencies	40	Airlines	-
Attractions	20	Travel agencies	-

5. Types of incentives provided to identify tourism businesses and ensure sustainable BSR development			
Provide funding for research	60	Award schemes	-
Building capacity for SMMEs	40	Inclusion of information and reports	-
Training and skills development	40	Sponsorship guidelines that support BSR	20
Tax exemptions	20		
6. Occurrences of multi-stakeholder dialogues on BSR			
Every quarter	50	Every semester	-
Annually	50	Every five year	-
Depend on the project	20		
7. Issues that are normally discussed various BSR multi-stakeholder dialogues			
Environment	80	Education	40
Poverty reduction	40	Corruption issues	20
Infrastructure	40	Safety	20
		Access to health services	-
8. Evaluating the impacts of tourism industry BSR implementation			
No measurement	80	Monitoring industry growth against set targets and statistics	20

Table 4: The level of government’s involvement in Western Cape tourism BSR

## Discussions

As shown in Table 1, tourism employees in the Western Cape Province in South Africa interpreted the concept of BSR in numerous different ways, yet these elucidations correspond to the scientific definitions of BSR. However, it is worrying that over 50% of respondents felt that tourism businesses persuade BSR for profit making. This supports Levy and Park’s (2011) contention that profit is a key driving force for BSR in many businesses. Ugur and Yarimoglu’s (2015) study also revealed the same findings. Furthermore, the respondents showed some agreement with the statement that managers advance their personal agendas through BSR, which agrees with the assessment of Fig (2005). The results further show that the respondents agreed that BSR is management’s responsibility and is driven largely by moral considerations. Esser and Dekker (2008), Levy and Park (2011), and Ramlall (2012) support this view. The tourism employees surveyed were found to have a fair understanding of BSR concept especially when this phenomenon is considered to be new in the South African tourism industry as outlined in the literature by Seeletse and Ladzani (2012); Taru and Gukurume (2013).

This is unsurprising because the findings in Table 4 show the highest response rate (60%) of government officials confirming that the government ensures awareness of the BSR concept within the tourism industry in the Western Cape Province. This then elucidates the fact that the level of government’s involvement in BSR implementation indeed influences employees’ interpretation and knowledge of the notion. The findings further indicate that the Western Cape government offers skills development to tourism employees while also ensuring that multi stakeholders’ dialogues occur frequently among the industry’ stakeholders. However, the main problem is that the results in Table 4, further show that although government creates awareness of the tourism BSR concept, it is biased towards the accommodation sector. The researchers argue that the success of tourism BSR implementation depends largely on a good understanding of the concept by the entire tourism industry stakeholders rather than by only a certain section. It was further found, that 80% of respondents do not have any measurements used to evaluate the successes of BSR implementation by tourism businesses. This may affect the tourism employees’ level of interpretation of BSR especially its impacts on beneficiaries.

Besides government’s level of involvement as a determinant for BSR interpretation, the results of this study showed that the size of a business also influences tourism employees’ knowledge of BSR phenomenon. According to Evngelinos *et al.* (2008), the bigger the tourism business,



the greater its likelihood to engage in BSR activities and use BSR as a marketing strategy, which increases the employees' level of knowledge of BSR. The study findings (tables 4) however indicate that most surveyed tourism businesses employ employees ranging between 1 and 10. Generally small medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs) are unlikely to be incorporating BSR initiatives in their business plans due to financial constraints, consequently, an understanding of BSR concept among tourism employees can only be fair as seen in Table 1.

As mentioned above, most of the tourism businesses surveyed in the study region were SMTEs, see Table 2. According to Dzansi (2016), such tourism businesses lack the capacity and resources to engage in certain BSR activities or make a great contribution to job creation. A positive contribution to BSR which then influences a constructive thoughtful of BSR is usually felt in the very large tourism businesses with over 100 employees (Chaves, Mozas, Puentes & Bernal, 2011). However, the findings of the study indicate that few large tourism businesses surveyed (Table 2) were capable of employing more than 150 workers. In South Africa, tourism businesses with 150 employees or more are considered large businesses, Tassiopoulos (2009), and they usually contribute towards job creation, among other things, and social responsibility in particular. Smaller firms with fewer than 150 employees tend to be involved in negative practices, such as the unlawful termination of employment, sexual harassment, discrimination, invasion of privacy, false imprisonment, breach of contract, causing emotional distress and labour law violations (Chaves *et al.*, 2011).

BSR requires the development of long-term vision (Argandoña, 2010), which subsequently determine the level of employees' knowledge, perception and interpretation of BSR. Chaves *et al.* (2011) argue that only tourism businesses that have been in operation for between 50 and 100 years are likely to be involved in training plans, employee benefit schemes, customer policies and economic indicators. There is a link between employees' level of BSR knowledge and the business level of operation. Generally, businesses that have been in operation for under ten years usually show interest in employment issues. Thus, employees working for these businesses would interpret BSR around employment issues. Big tourism businesses on one hand operate for a long period, and have a potential to invest in BSR rather than employment issues only. The longer the business operates the more it is able to invest in non-financial programmes such as BSR, while its employees improve on the understanding of the BSR theory.

## Conclusion

There are many different ways in which tourism businesses implement BSR activities, and its application has been changing overtime. This has led to many deliberations, thoughts and debates over the years about the interpretation of BSR concept, consequently leading to new procedures and different interests among business stakeholders. A confusion between BSR concept, sustainability and responsible tourism by the industry's employees shows that a lack of understanding of BSR phenomenon still exists. What constitutes the elements of implementation of the social responsibilities of a tourism business depend largely on the interpretation of BSR by employees. Employees play a major role in the implementation of BSR, hence their understanding and knowledge of BSR is vital. There are three main determinants of BSR interpretation that were outlined in this study. These include size of business, the length of business operation and the level of government's involvement in the implementation of BSR. In order for the tourism industry in Western Cape Province and South Africa at large to implement and promote awareness of BSRs these factors need to be looked at and attended to. Tourism businesses should try to stay in business for a longer period of time, and the South African government should assist through a funding model to identify small medium tourism businesses that have a potential to become major businesses and support them to achieve that objective. The facilitation of meetings and multi-stakeholder dialogues by



government can be established in order to strengthen relationships between all tourism businesses and not only accommodation as is the case in Western Cape Province. This will ensure that all tourism employees gain a good understanding of BSR. It is evident that the BSR phenomenon's interpretation will continue changing, depending on the degree of tourism businesses' activities, their expected rapid growth and business stakeholders' level of awareness of businesses' impacts on the society, the economy and critically, the environment.

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